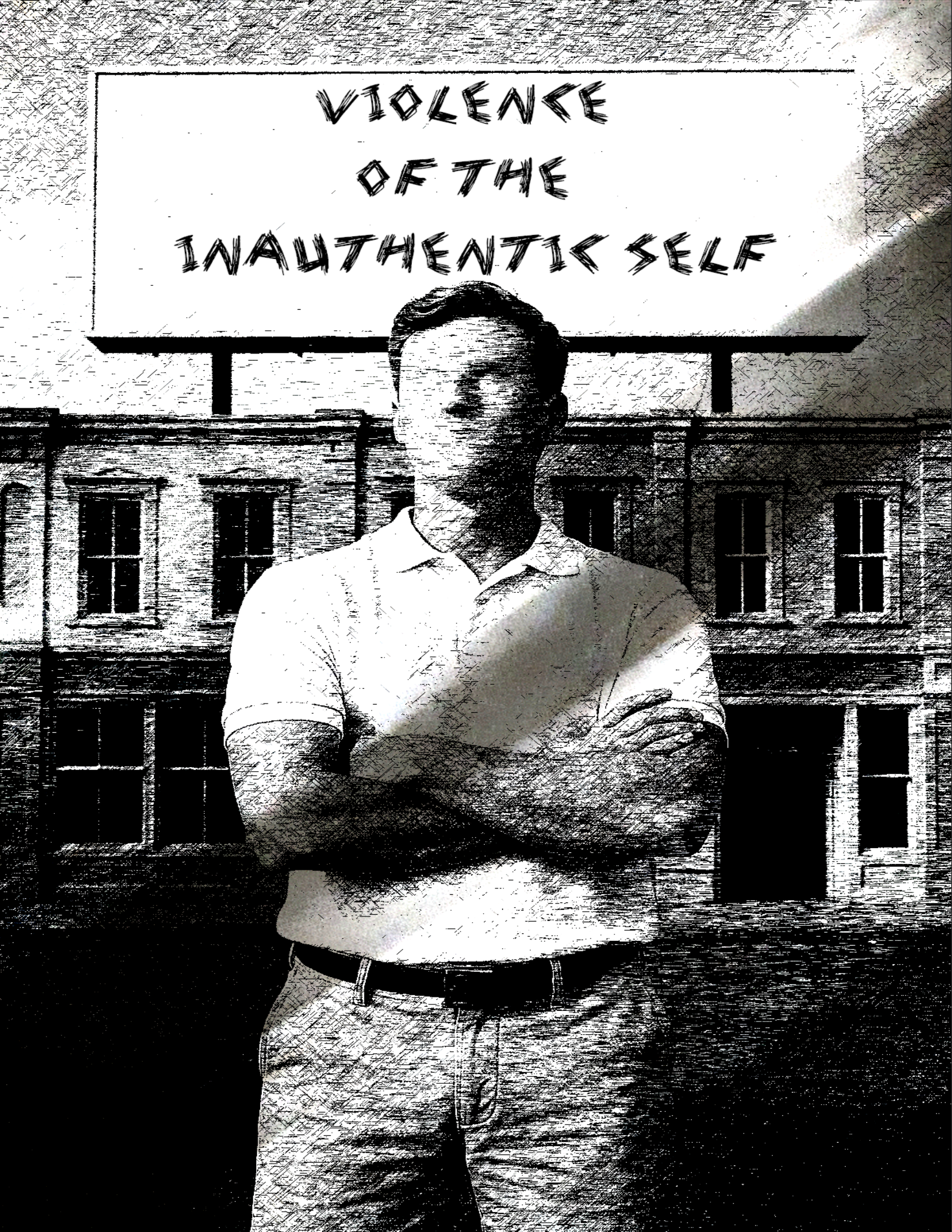
VIOLENCE OF THE INAUTHENTIC SELF



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This essay explores a simple but unsettling question:
What happens when a person's sense of identity loses coherence under conditions of isolation and social disconnection?

Drawing on psychology, sociology, and contemporary examples of identity conflict, the essay develops a framework for understanding violence as a failed attempt at identity stabilization.[0]

The analysis proceeds in three parts: identity collapse, identity substitution, and identity extraction. These dynamics operate at more than one scale. At the individual level, they may appear as psychological fragmentation, grievance, or violence used to force recognition. At the ideological level, they may appear as substitute identities that offer coherence without reciprocal accountability. At the institutional level, they may appear as identity extraction, bureaucratic recognition, or representational capture. The essay therefore moves from individual violence to structural violence not as a change of subject, but as an examination of the same underlying mechanism across different social forms.

We attempt to think carefully about violence without collapsing explanation into accusation. The analysis that follows is not a claim of causation, nor an effort to reduce violence to identity alone, but an inquiry into how certain forms of identity formation, and deformation, may interact with social environments to produce harm.

The argument developed here is exploratory in nature. It draws on established theory while remaining attentive to patterns observed across disparate contexts, with the aim of identifying structural dynamics rather than individual blame. Throughout, care is taken to distinguish hypothesis from evidence and interpretation from conclusion. The purpose of this work is not to prescribe a complete political program or reduce violence to a single moral explanation, but to offer a framework for understanding how violence can emerge when identity becomes separated from authenticity, accountability, and reciprocal belonging.[1,2,7,10]

Identity Crisis as the Psychological Core of Violence

Acts of violence are often treated as moral failures, ideological extremism, or expressions of hatred. While each of these explanations captures part of the phenomenon, they rarely explain why individuals arrive at violence in the first place. Across many contexts, from public mass shootings to extremist attacks and certain forms of interpersonal harm, a recurring pattern emerges: perpetrators are frequently attempting, consciously or not, to resolve profound instability in their sense of self.

The concept of identity crisis, first articulated by psychoanalyst Erik Erikson[1],[2], describes more than adolescent confusion or temporary uncertainty. It names a structural failure in the development of the self: the inability to integrate one's experiences, social roles, and future orientation into a coherent narrative[1]. Identity, in this sense, is not merely self-description or an identity category one adopts; it is the psychological infrastructure that allows a person to locate themselves meaningfully within a social world.

When identity formation succeeds, individuals experience continuity across time. They recognize themselves as the same person yesterday, today, and tomorrow, even as they evolve, grow, and change. When it fails, that continuity collapses. The individual experiences fragmentation and an inability to answer foundational questions such as *Who am I? Where do I belong? What am I for?*[1],[4] This fragmentation has predictable consequences. Individuals in identity crisis often externalize self-worth, seeking validation through dominance, recognition, or spectacle[3] rather than through mutual relation. Shame becomes chronic rather than situational. Humiliation is not merely painful; it becomes existential, experienced as proof of non-being, illegitimacy, or social nonexistence.[3],[5] Under these conditions, ambiguity is intolerable. The self demands certainty.

Rigid ideologies thrive under these conditions precisely because they offer dogmatic certainty. Whether political, religious, racial, or cultural, they provide what the fractured self cannot generate on its own: a manufactured identity with clear boundaries, enemies, and scripts for action.[13],[14] Importantly, they do not require slow relational development. They offer immediate, albeit false, coherence. It is here violence enters, not as madness, but as strategy. When the self feels invisible or incoherent, violence offers a brutal form of confirmation: *I exist because I can impose myself*. The act collapses internal chaos into external action. It replaces uncertainty with finality. In this sense, violent behavior is often less about hatred of others than about desperation to stabilize a collapsing self. If violence is treated only as moral deviance or only as ideological error, its psychological function remains misunderstood, and its recurrence becomes more likely because the phenomenon itself is composed of several interacting dynamics.

Violence, in this sense, is not merely destructive behavior. It is often the final

expression of an identity that could not sustain itself. This essay proposes that acts of violence frequently emerge when identity formation fails under conditions of social disconnection and relational instability. When individuals lack authentic community grounding, they often attempt to stabilize the self through substitute identities, ideological, hierarchical, or symbolic. These substitutes may temporarily restore a false coherence, but because they are detached from reciprocal relationships they remain brittle. When challenged, they fracture, sometimes catastrophically. The violence that follows is not random. It is an attempt to force recognition upon a self that cannot otherwise sustain itself. This framework does not claim that identity instability explains all violence, but it proposes that identity destabilization is a recurring mechanism that interacts with social disconnection, grievance, and ideological environments.

The identity that emerges under these conditions can be understood as an inauthentic self: a self constructed through substitution rather than relation.[0] The cover image, in which a blank, featureless figure stands before a Potemkin city, visually represents this condition: the appearance of structure without the relational substance necessary to sustain identity, a façade of coherence mistaken for the actuality of belonging.

Social Disconnection as a Force Multiplier

Identity crisis alone does not necessarily produce violence. It becomes dangerous when paired with social disconnection or alienation: the erosion of meaningful, reciprocal ties to others. This dynamic was analyzed in classical sociology by Émile Durkheim, whose concept of anomie describes the breakdown of shared norms and social integration under modern conditions.[7,8] Durkheim's insight was not that people need rules, but that, as humans are deeply social animals, they need belonging.[10] In colonial contexts, however, anomie should not be understood only as the passive weakening of norms under modernity. For colonized peoples, social disconnection is often actively imposed through the destruction, suppression, or displacement of existing systems of kinship, land relation, governance, spirituality, language, and communal obligation. Social bonds do more than provide support; they regulate desire, restrain impulse, and embed individuals in networks of mutual accountability and social responsibility. When those bonds weaken, individuals are left alone with their grievances, fears, and fantasies.

Several processes unfold predictably under conditions of disconnection:

1. First, informal moral regulation collapses.[7,8] In communities, behavior is shaped not only by law, but by the presence of others who matter to both the collective and individual. Isolation and alienation remove this relational constraint.

2. Second, shared meaning erodes.[7,8] Without common narratives, values, and goals, individuals struggle to situate their suffering within a broader context. Personal failure becomes cosmic injustice. This is especially dangerous when substitute forms of belonging are organized around shared enemies, a common feature of manufactured identity.

3. Third, cognition itself shifts. Isolated individuals ruminate. Grievances are rehearsed without interruption.[3,13,14] Perceived slights metastasize. Others are no longer encountered as complex humans, but as symbols, enemies, or abstractions: they become *the Other*.

Although Durkheim focused on suicide, the same logic can be extended to outwardly directed violence, including acts of mass and systemic violence. Violence becomes more likely when no relational bond remains strong enough to restrain action. Social disconnection does not cause violence by itself, but it acts as a multiplier, increasing the effects of identity instability, transforming distress into danger.

Violence as Identity Construction

Across many forms of violence, perpetrators attempt to construct an identity through the act itself: to become someone.[15],[16] This is visible in the narratives that accompany violence. Individuals adopt mythic identities: avenger, warrior, martyr. They frame their actions as morally necessary. They reinterpret their lives retroactively: *before, I was nothing; now, I matter*.

Psychologically, this reflects identity foreclosure: the premature closure of identity development through rigid commitment.[6] Foreclosed identities eliminate ambiguity. They define enemies. They authorize action. For individuals drowning in uncertainty, this clarity can be, and often is, intoxicating. But foreclosed identities are inherently fragile. Because they are not grounded in reciprocal relationships, they cannot tolerate or navigate contradiction. Disrespect is experienced not as disagreement, but as annihilation. Humiliation demands response. Violence becomes a distorted form of self-defense: not defense of the body, but defense of the identity itself. In this sense, violence is not merely destructive. In that moment it becomes a performance, an attempt to force coherence, recognition, and permanence onto a self that otherwise feels unstable or illegitimate. This dynamic helps explain why some perpetrators script their actions, leave manifestos, or seek notoriety. The violence is meant to be seen; recognition becomes part of the act itself.

Identity Suppression and Catastrophic Identity Breakdown

Available public mass-violence data do not support demographic claims about transgender perpetrators as a meaningful category. The observations considered here are instead hypothesis-generating, drawn from a small number of publicly documented cases in which identity distress, social isolation, online radicalization, and self-repudiation appear to converge. In several such instances, available materials, including self-authored writings, online activity, and investigative reporting, suggest a convergence of three conditions: profound social isolation; exposure to grievance-oriented, far-right, or nihilistic violent online ecosystems; and evidence of self-repudiation or detransitioning under conditions of perceived constraint, coercion, or identity pressure.

These observations are analytically suggestive rather than inferential. They are insufficient to establish prevalence, causation, or uniqueness relative to the broader population of mass shooters, and substantially more research would be required to determine whether such patterns are meaningfully distinct or statistically relevant. This subsection therefore functions as interpretive theory development, not empirical confirmation.

What renders these cases instructive is not the presence of a transgender identity, but the available record's suggestion of an internally coherent self-concept being suppressed, repudiated, or turned against itself under conditions of extreme social disconnection. This dynamic closely parallels the implosive form of identity breakdown described earlier: anomic disintegration, rooted in Durkheim's account of weakened social integration, in which the relational restraints that ordinarily inhibit catastrophic action begin to fail. Importantly, authenticity in this context does not imply biological determinism or fixed essence. Rather, it refers to a self-concept that has achieved internal coherence and is sustained through reciprocal social recognition. If gender identity, like other domains of identity, develops through the interaction of internal disposition and social expression, then enforced or self-coerced repudiation of that identity may constitute a particularly destabilizing form of identity foreclosure.

If future research were to substantiate this mechanism, its relevance would extend well beyond the small and statistically negligible subset of transgender perpetrators identified in public mass-violence cases. The same logic would also apply to manufactured or performative identities lacking grounding in culture, kinship, or accountable community relations. In such cases, identity collapse would not follow suppression of an authentic self, but the inevitable implosion of an identity constructed without relational foundation. In both scenarios, the operative risk factor is not identity itself, but identity severed from authenticity and reciprocal social grounding. Whether through the denial of an internally coherent self or the maintenance of an inauthentic one, the structural outcome may be the same: catastrophic identity breakdown under conditions of isolation and grievance.

Community Belonging as a Protective Factor

If identity instability and social disconnection increase the risk of violence, the inverse is equally important: community belonging is one of the strongest protective factors against both committing violence and becoming vulnerable to it. Belonging stabilizes identity by distributing it across relationships. A person who is known as a sibling, worker, parent, friend, or neighbor does not rely on a single role for self-definition. Loss or humiliation in one domain does not annihilate the self. Psychologically, belonging provides multiple mirrors: ways of being seen that do not depend on domination, coercion, or forced recognition. Accountability becomes relational. Correction does not equal erasure, and instead offers opportunities for growth. This does not mean that community is automatically protective in every form; belonging becomes protective when it is reciprocal, accountable, and capable of correction without abandonment.

Neurobiologically, social connection reduces baseline threat perception.[11],[12] The nervous system becomes less reactive, impulses are more easily regulated, and aggression is more readily inhibited. Sociologically, healthy communities resolve conflict early. Harm is addressed through mediation, repair, and reintegration rather than expulsion, except in grave circumstances. Individuals remain embedded rather than isolated. The implication is not sentimental; it is structural: people embedded in reciprocal relationships do not need violence to feel real. Violence thrives where belonging has collapsed. It recedes where recognition is mutual, durable, and accountable.

Authentic Identity vs. Performed Identity

The dynamics described earlier reflect a central distinction between authentic identity and manufactured identity. Authentic identity emerges through lived relations. It is shaped by family, community, responsibility, and accountability. It tolerates ambiguity. It evolves over time. It is resilient because it is distributed across relationships rather than concentrated in a single narrative. Performed identity, by contrast, is abstracted from relation. It is manufactured and imposed through ideology, hierarchy, or myth. It requires enemies to maintain coherence. It demands recognition without accountability. It is brittle.

When performed identities are challenged, they can collapse, sometimes explosively. Disrespect becomes existential threat. Violence becomes justified as defense of the self.[3,5] This distinction explains why violence does not generally arise from resilient identity, but from brittle identity: identity that cannot bend without experiencing contradiction as annihilation. It also prepares the ground for understanding structural violence, where entire populations are subjected to imposed identities divorced from relation.

The distinction between authentic and performed identity does not apply only to individuals. Entire institutions and political systems can reproduce the same dynamics. When identities are detached from reciprocal relations: whether through ideology, bureaucracy, or symbolic claims to belonging: the resulting structures can generate forms of harm that mirror the psychological patterns described above.

Bureaucracy, in this framework, should not be understood as inherently violent in every form. Communities require memory, record keeping, deliberation, and organized procedure. The problem emerges when bureaucracy becomes detached from reciprocal relations and begins to treat living peoples as administrative objects rather than as members of accountable communities.

In the colonial state, bureaucratic violence operates by replacing relational recognition with external classification: blood quantum, enrollment files, census categories, racial checkboxes, grant eligibility rules, academic hiring criteria, institutional diversity metrics, and state-recognized identity categories. These mechanisms do not merely describe identity; they participate in producing and constraining it. They decide who is legible, who is funded, who is believed, who is represented, and who is excluded. In this way, bureaucracy enacts violence by converting relation into paperwork and sovereignty into institutional permission. The following sections examine how these identity distortions appear not only in individual acts of violence, but also in structural phenomena embedded within modern political life.

The dynamics described thus far can be understood as three related distortions in the

formation of identity: collapse, substitution, and extraction. Collapse occurs when identity disintegrates under conditions of isolation, humiliation, and unresolved grievance. Substitution occurs when individuals attempt to stabilize the self through externally supplied roles, ideologies, myths, or symbolic identities. Extraction occurs when identities are claimed without the reciprocal relations that normally give them legitimacy. Together, these processes form what might be called the architecture of the inauthentic self.

In this sense, many public acts of mass violence can be interpreted as extreme expressions of the inauthentic self attempting to assert its reality through domination.

Public Mass Violence

Public discussions of mass violence in the United States are frequently distorted by definitional slippage.[19] Broad "four or more shot" metrics can collapse fundamentally different phenomena into a single category. Gang conflicts, drug-trade disputes, domestic incidents, and public attacks motivated by grievance, ideology, or identity crisis are often treated as equivalent, even though they may involve different motives, social conditions, and prevention strategies. This obscures both causes and solutions. For the purposes of this essay, the analytically relevant category is narrower: public or semi-public attacks not primarily attributable to gang conflict, organized crime, drug-market disputes, or other underlying criminal activity. Datasets such as the FBI's Active Shooter reports and the NIJ-supported Public Mass Shootings database are useful because they isolate incidents closer to this category.[17],[18] Within this narrower, and analytically cleaner, categorization, several patterns are consistent across decades.

First, perpetrators in these narrower public mass-violence datasets are overwhelmingly male. Second, white perpetrators often form a plurality or slight majority depending on timeframe, definition, and dataset, though race alone does not explain the phenomenon. The significance of whiteness here is not biological, moral, or ethnic. Following Theodore W. Allen's account of whiteness as a historically manufactured social and legal classification, whiteness is better understood as a political identity produced through hierarchy rather than a reciprocal culture grounded in kinship, land, or communal obligation.[33] Its danger becomes clearest when this manufactured identity is organized through grievance narratives of replacement, entitlement, and threatened status. Third, perpetrators are often in early-to-mid adulthood rather than adolescence. Fourth, and most important for this framework, many are marked by grievance, recent destabilizing stressors, identity strain, and social disconnection.[16],[17],[18] These perpetrators are not primarily embedded in criminal subcultures. They are not acting to protect income streams or territory. Instead, their violence is expressive rather than instrumental. It is about recognition, retaliation for perceived humiliation, and the construction of meaning.

Importantly, these datasets do not reliably track partisan or ideological affiliation. Apparent absence of ideological motive may reflect several different problems: genuine ideological incoherence, contradictory perpetrator materials, limitations in law-enforcement classification, or selective media coverage. Post hoc labeling is therefore common and not always reliable.

However, when violence is explicitly ideological, classified as extremist-related rather than merely mass casualty, the picture sharpens. In ADL's recent extremist-murder reporting, documented extremist-related murders in 2023 and 2024 were attributed entirely to right-wing extremists, though such findings should be read within the limits of ADL's

dataset and reporting categories.[20] Right-wing ideological ecosystems appear especially effective at converting grievance, identity instability, and perceived humiliation into dehumanizing narratives that can be used to justify harm. This does not mean that political violence is exclusive to the right; rather, it means that the pathways from identity grievance to lethal ideological violence have been especially visible and lethal within far-right ecosystems in recent U.S. extremist-murder data.[20],[21] Within this narrower category, public mass violence appears less as conventional crime and more as grievance- and identity-crisis-driven harm, intensified by narratives of enemy-construction, dehumanization, and existential threat.

The dynamics examined thus far have focused primarily on the individual, how identity can fracture under conditions of disconnection, coercion, or hollow belonging. Yet identity does not develop in isolation. It is shaped, reinforced, and destabilized within larger social structures. If the inauthentic self can implode at the level of the individual, it is worth asking whether analogous distortions operate at the level of communities, institutions, and political formations. The question that follows, then, is not whether structural phenomena mirror personal identity breakdown, but whether they may in fact precede and condition it. At the structural level, inauthentic identity does not present as psychological fragmentation but as representational distortion. It emerges when belonging is claimed without relation, when recognition is detached from accountability, and when identity becomes a vehicle for access rather than a function of responsibility.

Case Studies: Identity Distortion Across Scale

1) Identity Collapse: Annunciation Catholic School

The Annunciation Catholic School shooting offers a difficult example of catastrophic identity breakdown because it does not appear to emerge from one coherent ideological system. Rather, the available materials suggest a convergence of depression, suicidality, anti-religious hatred, mass-shooter imitation, racialized and antisemitic symbolism, gendered self-repudiation, and immersion in violent online subcultures. In this sense, the case is not analytically useful because the perpetrator had identified as transgender. It is useful because the available record suggests a self unable to remain coherent under pressure, eventually reorganizing itself through violence, spectacle, and symbolic degradation.

On August 27, 2025, Robin Westman opened fire through the windows of Annunciation Catholic Church in Minneapolis during a school Mass, killing two children and wounding seventeen people before dying by suicide. AP reported that Westman used a rifle, shotgun, and pistol, and that a 2020 court petition had changed the name from Robert to Robin because Westman "identifies as a female and wants her name to reflect that identification." The prominence given to Westman's transgender status in public coverage should be read cautiously, since media narratives often emphasize identity markers unevenly depending on the communities involved and the political usefulness of the frame.

Westman's reported writings and videos suggest a fractured symbolic field rather than a stable political program. KSTP reported that videos believed by police to have been posted by Westman showed weapons, ammunition, and a handwritten letter describing severe depression, years of suicidality, and a "final action against this world." Those materials also reportedly included anti-religious phrases, memes, references to mass murderers, Holocaust-related references, racial slurs, and a white-supremacist gesture. ADL likewise concluded that preliminary research showed a deep fascination with mass killers and extensive research into them, while noting that the materials did not appear to provide a clear motive or ideological alignment.

The gender-related material should be handled carefully, but it is relevant to this paper's argument. Reported translations of Westman's writings suggest intense distress around gender identity, including regret, exhaustion, and self-repudiation. This should not be interpreted as evidence that transgender identity produces violence. A more defensible interpretation is almost the reverse: if transgender identification represented an earlier attempt at self-coherence, then later rejection or degradation of that identity may be understood as one destabilizing rupture within a broader collapse. The possible O9A/764 layer should also be treated as interpretive rather than fully established. Some analysis has

argued that Westman's symbolic material invoked Order of Nine Angles-style nihilism. Separately, ADL describes 764 more generally as a nihilistic and misanthropic network shaped by O9A aesthetics, status-seeking, coercion, and fascination with mass violence.

The significance of this case is therefore not that it proves a linear causal chain from gender distress to violence. It does not. Its significance is that it shows how a collapsing self may reach toward substitute identities already circulating in violent digital environments. When authentic identity becomes unbearable, and when community recognition is replaced by shame, spectacle, and symbolic violence, the mass-shooter archetype itself can become a manufactured self. The act of violence becomes a final attempt to become legible: not through relation, responsibility, or belonging, but through terror.

2) Identity Substitution: Buffalo TOPS

The Buffalo TOPS supermarket attack illustrates identity substitution in one of its clearest racialized forms. Unlike cases where the available materials suggest ideological incoherence or generalized collapse, this attack was organized around a more stable ideological script: the white supremacist "defender" acting against an imagined racial replacement. On May 14, 2022, Payton Gendron targeted Black people at a Tops Friendly Market in Buffalo, killing ten Black people and injuring three others. Federal prosecutors stated that his motive was to prevent Black people from "replacing" white people and to inspire similar racially motivated attacks.

The attack was not merely interpreted as symbolic after the fact; it was planned from the outset as racialized spectacle and ideological performance. According to the Department of Justice, Gendron wore tactical clothing, body armor, a helmet, and a GoPro camera, livestreamed the attack, and carried a rifle marked with racial slurs and the phrase "The Great Replacement." Investigators also found that he had written a self-described manifesto containing a detailed plan, a diagram of the store, discussion of equipment, and statements explaining his racial motive. He selected the ZIP code and the Tops location because of the Black population there.

This matters because the violence did not emerge from ordinary criminal motive, territorial conflict, or material gain. It emerged from whiteness functioning as manufactured racial identity: a political identity organized through hierarchy, grievance, enemy-construction, and threatened status.[33] This identity gave the perpetrator a role, enemy, mission, and audience. ADL's analysis found that the manifesto promoted white supremacist and antisemitic views, repeatedly invoked Great Replacement ideology, closely echoed earlier white supremacist mass-shooter texts, and named previous attackers as figures of admiration. In this sense, the perpetrator did not simply possess hateful beliefs; he entered an existing symbolic lineage of racialized mass violence.

The online dimension strengthens this interpretation because it shows that the substitute identity was not constructed in isolation. The New York Attorney General's office reported that platforms including 4chan, 8kun, Reddit, Discord, Twitch, and YouTube were examined for their role in the attack, and described anonymous, weakly moderated spaces as breeding grounds for racist hate speech and radicalization. WIRED likewise reported that Gendron distributed access to a livestream, online diary, and manifesto shortly before the attack, and that 4chan users reacted to the violence in real time. The substitute identity was therefore formed within a digital environment that rewarded spectacle, racial paranoia, imitation, and notoriety.

The Buffalo attack therefore demonstrates how whiteness, when organized as a manufactured identity under imagined siege, can convert alienation into racialized violence. The perpetrator's identity did not stabilize through reciprocal relation, community responsibility, or accountability. Instead, it sought a false coherence through enemy-construction. Black people were transformed into symbols of demographic threat, Jews into imagined architects of replacement, and violence into proof of racial commitment. In this sense, the attack reflects the broader pattern examined in this essay: identity detached from relation becomes brittle, abstract, and dangerous; when supplied with a violent ideological script, it may attempt to force itself into reality through domination, spectacle, and death.

3) Identity Extraction: Buffy Sainte-Marie

The Buffy Sainte-Marie controversy illustrates identity extraction at the institutional level, where an identity claim not grounded in accountable Indigenous origin, nationhood, or reciprocal community relation can be made to appear coherent through awards, media authority, public memory, and bureaucratic recognition. This case is not merely about ancestry in a narrow biological sense. Its significance lies in how a long-standing claim to Indigenous identity became institutionally productive: it shaped who was celebrated, who was invited to speak, who received honors, who was treated as representative, and who became legible to settler institutions as an Indigenous cultural authority.

In 2023, CBC's *The Fifth Estate* published an investigation challenging Sainte-Marie's long-standing claims to Cree identity, citing family interviews and a birth certificate indicating that she was born in Stoneham, Massachusetts, to Albert and Winifred Santamaria, the same white American couple previously described in her public narrative as adoptive parents. Sainte-Marie denied misleading the public and stated that she did not know where she was from or who her birth parents were. Members of the Piapot family also defended her, stating that she had been adopted under Cree custom and that colonial documents should not override their inherent right to determine family and community belonging.

This complexity is important because it prevents the case from collapsing into the colonial state's authority to determine Indigeneity. A birth certificate alone does not decide belonging. The deeper issue is the distinction between adoption into relation and public claims of Indigenous origin. Sainte-Marie's public identity was not limited to adult adoption into a Cree family; it also involved claims of Indigenous birth, Sixties Scoop displacement, and origin on or near Piapot First Nation, claims that became central to her cultural authority and institutional recognition. Billboard Canada reported that the CBC investigation produced a birth certificate listing her presumed adoptive parents as her birth parents, while also noting that she had been adopted by Emile Piapot and Clara Starblanket Piapot as a young adult according to Cree law and custom.

The material consequences of this recognition were not abstract. Institutional recognition produces more than symbolic praise; it shapes careers, archives, funding pathways, public memory, and cultural authority. Sainte-Marie received major honors connected to Indigenous representation, including the 2018 Juno Award for Indigenous Album of the Year for *Medicine Songs*, a category in which Kelly Fraser's *Sedna* was also nominated. After the CBC investigation, the Indigenous Women's Collective called for Sainte-Marie's 2018 Juno to be rescinded, arguing that all Indigenous artists in that category should be reconsidered for the honor. Sainte-Marie's appointment to the Order of Canada was also terminated in 2025 following the controversy, after she had first been appointed in 1997 and later elevated to Companion of the Order.

The stakes of this displacement become especially clear when viewed alongside Kelly Fraser. Fraser, an Inuk artist nominated in the same 2018 Juno category, died by suicide in 2019 after what her family described as a long struggle with PTSD rooted in childhood trauma, racism, and persistent cyberbullying. This should not be reduced to a single-cause claim that one award caused Fraser's death. Rather, Fraser's case reveals that institutional displacement is not abstract; it is borne by actual Indigenous artists already navigating colonial trauma, scarcity, racism, and public scrutiny. When recognition intended for Indigenous artists is captured by those with identity claims later shown to be fraudulent, contradictory, or ungrounded in Indigenous origin, the harm falls on actual Indigenous artists. In this sense, the Sainte-Marie controversy demonstrates the broader mechanism examined in this essay: identity extraction does not need to appear as direct physical force to enact violence. It can operate through recognition, awards, institutional memory, and the redirection of cultural authority away from the peoples for whom those structures were allegedly created.

Public motive classifications are often incomplete because identity-based harm rarely operates through a single cause. Major events of this kind usually emerge from multiple interacting pressures rather than from one isolated motive. In spectacular acts of violence, domestic grievance, misogyny, extremist subcultures, racial ideology, online radicalization,

and the pursuit of notoriety may overlap, even when media narratives isolate only one factor. At the structural level, the same narrowing can occur when institutions frame identity extraction as individual controversy rather than as part of a broader pattern of bureaucratic validation, representational displacement, and harm to the communities whose recognition has been redirected.

Pretendianism as Structural Identity Violence

The case studies above illustrate identity distortion across multiple scales: collapse at the level of the individual, substitution through ideological scripts, and extraction through institutional recognition. Pretendianism represents one of the clearest structural forms of this pattern. Pretendianism refers to false or strategically exaggerated claims to Indigenous identity that are not grounded in recognition by Indigenous nations, kinship systems, legitimate citizenship, or reciprocal community accountability.[22],[23],[24],[25] Drawing on the work of Darryl Leroux, pretendianism is best understood not merely as isolated individual deception, but as a structural phenomenon that emerges within settler colonial societies.[22] Pretendianism shifts Indigeneity away from its political reality as nationhood, citizenship, governance, kinship, and land relation, and toward abstraction: vague ancestry, generalized spirituality, aesthetics, or claims of moral alignment detached from accountable community recognition.[22],[23],[26] This shift is not neutral. It has concrete political and material consequences.

First, pretendianism erodes Indigenous sovereignty. If anyone can declare themselves Indigenous based on feeling, distant ancestry, or symbolic affinity, Indigenous nations lose authority over their own citizenship and political boundaries. Nationhood is reduced to identity performance. Second, it redirects resources. Jobs, grants, academic positions, artistic platforms, and media attention intended for Indigenous peoples are diverted to those who are not accountable to Indigenous communities. Third, it produces epistemic violence. Political critiques rooted in land, law, treaty, and jurisdiction are diluted into consumable fragments of "Indigenous wisdom." Settler institutions gain access to Indigenous symbolism without Indigenous power, authenticity, or accountability.

As Kim TallBear has argued, identity without relations becomes a colonial abstraction. Pretendianism replaces reciprocal accountability with unilateral self-assertion. The resulting harm is not sudden or spectacular, but slow, administrative, and accumulative: enacted through policy, narrative, institutional reward structures, and public recognition. Pretendianism can therefore be understood not simply as misrepresentation, but as a structural form of the inauthentic self operating at the level of institutions and public identity claims.[23]

Mixed Indigenous People as Collateral Damage in the Re-Racialization of Nationhood

One of the most destabilizing effects of pretendianism is not simply that non-Indigenous individuals claim Indigenous identity. It is that, in response to proliferating false claims, institutions and publics begin to re-racialize Indigeneity itself. The political category of nationhood quietly collapses back into the racial categories of colonial origin. When that happens, legitimate Indigenous people of mixed ancestry often become the first to bear the burden of suspicion. Indigenous nations are not racial groupings. They are political communities whose belonging is defined through their own systems of relation, law, and responsibility. Race, by contrast, is not an ethnicity, culture, or coherent biological reality. It is a colonial classification system: pseudoscientific in foundation, but materially powerful in consequence. Following Theodore W. Allen, whiteness in particular should be understood as a manufactured legal and social status rather than an authentic ethnic identity.[33] When racial categories are treated as though they reveal culture, belonging, or political legitimacy, they displace the relational systems through which Indigenous nations actually define themselves. This is why TallBear's critique of identity detached from relations is so important: when Indigeneity is reduced to ancestry percentages, DNA results, phenotype, or aesthetic expression, sovereignty is displaced by racial logic.[23]

Pretendianism accelerates this displacement. When unverifiable claims multiply, institutions often react defensively. Rather than strengthening nation-based verification, they may revert, implicitly or explicitly, to visual and racial cues. The question becomes not "Are you recognized by your nation?" but "Do you look Indigenous?" For Indigenous people mixed with European ancestry, this produces heightened suspicion. Light-skinned citizens of Indigenous nations may find themselves over-scrutinized, forced to prove belonging repeatedly in public, academic, and professional contexts. Their legitimacy is treated as conditional rather than relational. This reaction is understandable given the prevalence of pretendianism, but it remains harmful when it replaces reciprocal recognition with phenotype policing.

For Afro-Indigenous people, the harm compounds. The legacy of slavery includes genealogical rupture, forced racial classification, and the systematic erasure of Indigenous kinship ties. Historians such as Tiya Miles and Claudio Saunt document complex histories of Afro-Indigenous interrelation in which colonial racial systems fractured, but did not eliminate, kinship.[27],[28] When pretendianism destabilizes public understanding of Indigenous nationhood, Afro-Indigenous people may be subjected to double invalidation: racialized denial from settler society and heightened suspicion within Indigenous spaces reacting to fraud. This is not an argument for racialized gatekeeping. It is the opposite. As Audra Simpson demonstrates in *Mohawk Interruptus*, sovereignty depends in part on refusal: the refusal of externally imposed recognition, classification, and political definition. Indigenous

nations must retain the authority to define their own citizenship, membership, and political boundaries. When those boundaries are undermined by self-assertion detached from nation recognition, legitimate mixed-ancestry citizens are exposed to external racial policing.[26]

The status of legitimate Afro-Indigenous people is placed under acute stress by a distinct identity movement in which individuals with no recognized ancestral, cultural, or political ties to Indigenous nations assert that Black Americans are the "true" Indigenous peoples of the American continents. This should not be read as a claim about Black communities as a whole. The structural effect of this claim, regardless of individual intent, is the erasure of living Indigenous nations and the destabilization of Afro-Indigenous legitimacy through attempted replacement rather than relation.

This phenomenon functions as a structural psy-op, not in the sense of a centrally coordinated conspiracy, but as a recurring information effect that predictably drives a wedge between Black and Indigenous communities that should otherwise be natural allies in anti-colonial struggle. By reframing Indigeneity as racial abstraction rather than as nationhood grounded in kinship, governance, citizenship, and land relation, these narratives displace Indigenous sovereignty while simultaneously exploiting the historical dispossession of Black peoples.

The following account is offered as an illustrative observation rather than representative evidence. It shows how abstract identity claims can translate into interpersonal harm under specific conditions. On one occasion, an adherent of this replacement narrative entered a local Pow Wow and began confronting attendees, including elders, meaning respected community members who often carry cultural, historical, or ceremonial authority, as well as disabled veterans. She accused attendees of being "white" or "Siberian" and asserted that Black Americans were the true Indigenous inhabitants of the continent. She filmed these confrontations and uploaded them to social media.

While the initial incident was disruptive rather than physically violent, the situation appeared to intensify in the months that followed. In material circulating within the same online milieu, AI-generated videos depicted the kidnapping and murder of identifiable Indigenous community members. Because this account is not offered as representative evidence, it should be understood as an illustrative example of how abstract identity claims can move from symbolic replacement into targeted intimidation.

This form of pretendianism often manifests through direct interpersonal and material harms, including targeted harassment campaigns against Indigenous individuals, threats or acts of violence, and criminal financial fraud schemes that divert resources away from both Indigenous and Black communities. In many cases, Black people seeking connection, history, or redress become the primary targets of deception. The harm is

therefore twofold: Indigenous people are dispossessed through replacement narratives, while Black communities are instrumentalized and exploited.

This pattern is distinct from more common forms of European or settler pretendianism, which tend to operate through institutional capture rather than direct confrontation. In these cases, false or exaggerated claims to Indigeneity move through media, academia, arts funding, policy spaces, awards, publishing, and public representation. Settler institutions often reward these claims because they provide a legible and consumable form of Indigeneity without requiring accountability to Indigenous nations, land, treaty, or community authority. The result is not merely misrepresentation. It is the displacement of Indigenous voices, the erosion of public understanding, and the quiet reallocation of authority, opportunity, and resources away from accountable Indigenous people.

Although these vectors operate differently, their structural outcome is similar: Indigenous self-determination is weakened, public understanding of nationhood is distorted, and potential Black-Indigenous solidarities necessary to confront colonial power are fractured.
Pretendianism thus produces a predictable cycle:

1. False or exaggerated claims proliferate.
2. Public discourse grows confused about Indigenous nationhood.
3. Institutions respond by re-racializing Indigeneity.
4. Legitimate mixed-ancestry and Afro-Indigenous people bear the burden of proof.

The violence here is not spectacular. It is administrative, relational, and cumulative. It manifests as over-surveillance, delegitimization, exclusion from opportunity, phenotype policing, and the erosion of political standing.[23],[29],[30]

As Patrick Wolfe famously argued, settler colonialism is a structure, not an event. Pretendianism operates within that structure by destabilizing the relational foundations of nationhood and replacing them with extractive identity performance. Mixed-ancestry Indigenous people, whose belonging is grounded in relation rather than phenotype, are disproportionately harmed when relation is displaced by the colonial construct of race.[23],[29],[33] The solution is not racial purity. It is nation-based belonging grounded in citizenship, kinship, land relation, community recognition, culture, and reciprocal accountability to the peoples, nations, and communities from which identity derives its legitimacy.

Pretendianism as a Structural Psy-Op and Colonial Technology

More broadly, pretendianism functions as a colonial information technology: a recurring pattern that shapes perception, redirects political energy, and benefits settler colonial governance. It produces psy-op-like effects not because every participant consciously intends them, but because the outcome is predictable. Public attention is diverted away from land, treaty, jurisdiction, and Indigenous authority, and toward disputes over personal authenticity. Pretendianism accomplishes three outcomes simultaneously. First, it confuses the public by making Indigenous identity appear infinitely self-declarable. Questions of land, treaty, jurisdiction, and nationhood are displaced by debates about personal authenticity. Second, it fragments Indigenous political power. Competing "Indigenous" voices dilute clear demands, allowing settler institutions to exploit ambiguity, delay action, or deny responsibility. Third, it recenters settlers as protagonists. Indigenous struggle becomes a backdrop for settler identity work, shifting the focus from restitution to self-discovery, and from sovereignty to feeling.

Colonial systems do not require conscious malice to reproduce themselves.[29],[31],[32] They persist because certain narratives are rewarded, institutionalized, and normalized. Pretendianism survives because it is useful: it converts structural critique into personal narrative and absorbs resistance into identity consumption. This is the same logic observed earlier at the individual level. Identity extracted from relation produces harm because it replaces accountability with performance. Whether expressed through bullets, bureaucracies, awards, or public recognition, the underlying mechanism is the same.[0]

Before concluding, it is worth considering that these dynamics may operate in both directions. The preceding sections have moved from individual breakdown to structural distortion, but structural distortion may also shape the conditions under which individual identity forms. Societies saturated with manufactured, performative, or extractive identities may cultivate environments in which coherent self-formation becomes increasingly difficult. When belonging is modeled as abstraction rather than relation, and recognition is decoupled from accountability, individuals are left to construct selves from unstable foundations. Under such conditions, catastrophic identity collapse may not be anomalous but symptomatic.

Ideological Identity Substitution, Performative Politics, and Entrepreneurial Grift

Not all individuals experiencing identity instability progress toward the catastrophic breakdown described earlier. In many cases, individuals uncertain about who they are or where they belong seek mechanisms that can provide temporary coherence. One increasingly common mechanism in contemporary society is the adoption of highly visible ideological identities.

Political ideology can provide powerful psychological scaffolding.[1,6,13] It offers moral certainty, narratives that explain the world, and a sense of belonging within a broader movement. For individuals already struggling with questions of identity, these structures can function as ready-made frameworks onto which the self can be attached. Instead of developing identity through lived relationships, place-based belonging, and reciprocal responsibility, individuals may adopt ideological affiliation as a substitute foundation for the self.[1,6,13]

This phenomenon can occur across ideological environments, though not always with the same consequences. In right-wing spaces, identity instability may be channeled into grievance-based narratives centered on cultural decline, civilizational threat, racial hierarchy, or hierarchical belonging.[13,14,15] In left-wing spaces, similar instability may manifest less often as lethal violence and more often as performative revolutionary identity, moral absolutism, symbolic identification with historical political figures, or competitive displays of ideological purity. In both cases, ideology becomes less a tool for understanding society and more a structure through which individuals attempt to stabilize their sense of self.

While ideological identity performance can occur across the political spectrum, the structural conditions that translate identity instability into lethal violence are not evenly distributed. In recent U.S. extremist-murder datasets, lethal ideological violence has been disproportionately associated with far-right extremist movements, especially white-supremacist and replacement-oriented currents.[17,20,21] This does not implicate all conservatives or religious communities. Rather, it suggests that particular ideological narratives, especially those organized around cultural siege, racial hierarchy, hierarchical belonging, or apocalyptic struggle, are especially capable of converting identity crisis into dehumanizing action. Left-wing movements can also generate performative political identities, but the mechanisms through which identity instability escalates into lethal violence appear significantly less common.

When political identity becomes performative rather than relational, individuals may begin to construct a sense of self around symbolic identification with movements, figures, or ideological purity. Rather than developing identity through lived community participation and responsibility, individuals may adopt political personas that provide recognition within

ideological subcultures. In digital environments especially, this dynamic can encourage competitive displays of ideological purity, moral grandstanding, and attempts to gain visibility or status within political recognition economies.

Importantly, ideological identification does not necessarily lead to violence. In many cases it provides temporary coherence, allowing individuals to avoid the more catastrophic forms of identity collapse described earlier. For individuals experiencing identity uncertainty, ideological affiliation can offer structure, belonging, and purpose. However, when that identity remains externally constructed rather than relationally grounded, it may continue to depend on symbolic performance rather than lived responsibility. When ideological structures are challenged, rejected by peers, or fail to provide the belonging they promise, the underlying instability can re-emerge. In such moments, the symbolic identity that once provided coherence may instead amplify feelings of betrayal, humiliation, or exclusion.

Seen in this light, ideological performance should not be understood primarily as hypocrisy or opportunism, even when it appears exaggerated or theatrical. Often it represents an attempt, sometimes sincere and sometimes clumsy, to construct coherence where stable identity foundations are absent. The deeper issue is not ideological engagement itself, but the substitution of ideology for the relational structures through which identity normally develops.

In addition to identity substitution and performative political identity, contemporary political environments have also produced a phenomenon that can be described as entrepreneurial grift: the strategic cultivation and monetization of identity instability within ideological audiences. While many instances of ideological identity performance emerge from genuine attempts to construct coherence, the same psychological dynamics can also be deliberately exploited. In contemporary political environments, a class of actors has emerged who function as identity entrepreneurs. These individuals cultivate audiences by identifying communities experiencing uncertainty, alienation, or grievance, then amplifying those conditions through narratives that promise belonging, clarity, or moral certainty.

Such actors often present themselves as interpreters of crisis: guides, commentators, revolutionaries, cultural defenders, or guardians of truth. Yet their influence frequently depends on maintaining the very instability they claim to resolve. Audiences experiencing identity uncertainty become a renewable resource, generating attention, financial support, social capital, and political influence for those positioned as authorities over the crisis.

This phenomenon appears across ideological environments, though it takes different forms. Within right-wing media ecosystems, it may manifest through narratives of civilizational decline, demographic siege, or existential cultural threat that mobilize

grievance and loyalty. Within left-wing spaces, it may appear through performative revolutionary identity, ideological purity economies, or commentary structures that reward outrage, internal conflict, and symbolic radicalism over sustained community organization.

In both cases, the underlying dynamic is similar: identity instability becomes a market.[0] Emotional energies associated with humiliation, alienation, grievance, and the need for belonging are converted into attention, influence, and economic gain. Because these systems benefit from sustained grievance and identity tension, they may discourage the relational grounding and practical community engagement that would otherwise produce more durable forms of identity stability.

Seen in this light, identity entrepreneurs do not simply comment on identity crises. They become structural participants in their reproduction, sustaining environments in which grievance, alienation, and performative identity remain politically and economically valuable.

Political ideology can organize communities, confront injustice, and coordinate collective action. But when ideology becomes the primary anchor of the self rather than an extension of lived relational identity, it risks reproducing the same instability found in other forms of manufactured identity. This brings the essay back to its central concern: identity becomes dangerous when it is made to stand in for relation.

Conclusion: Violence and the Inauthentic Self

The argument developed throughout this essay rests on a central claim: violence often emerges not from identity itself, but from identity that has become unstable, coerced, extracted, or detached from reciprocal relation. When people lose access to meaningful belonging, accountable community, and coherent narratives of the self, identity often seeks replacement forms: ideology, spectacle, domination, institutional recognition, or symbolic belonging. These substitutes can provide temporary coherence, but they do not repair the underlying separation from relation.

The psychological framework of Erik Erikson and the sociological framework of Émile Durkheim help illuminate this process.[1],[7] Identity crisis describes the failure to integrate experience, social role, and future orientation into a coherent self.[1],[2] Anomie describes the weakening of shared norms, obligations, and social integration.[7],[8] Together, these concepts help explain why isolation and disconnection can make identity fragile.

For colonized peoples, however, anomie cannot be understood only as passive social decay. It is often actively imposed. Colonialism produces disconnection by attacking the institutions through which Indigenous and Black communities reproduce belonging, authority, memory, and obligation. Land dispossession, forced schooling, racial classification, religious suppression, policing, child removal, labor exploitation, and bureaucratic identity management all work to sever people from the social worlds that stabilize identity. The resulting alienation is not merely a failure of integration into the dominant society. In many cases, it is the success of colonial alienation.

This distinction clarifies why sovereignty matters. Sovereignty is not only symbolic recognition, cultural preservation, or inclusion within existing institutions. It is the restoration of the conditions through which community bonds, identity, responsibility, and accountability can be repaired. If colonial alienation works by displacing Indigenous and Black systems of belonging, then repair cannot be reduced to individual therapy, representation, or institutional inclusion. It requires the restoration of community authority and collective self-determination.

The case studies are not equivalent, but they show the same mechanism at different scales: collapse in the Annunciation case, substitution in the Buffalo TOPS attack, and extraction in the Buffy Sainte-Marie controversy. Each demonstrates a different way identity severed from reciprocal relation seeks coherence through spectacle, domination, recognition, violence, or institutional validation.

through imagined siege, replacement anxiety, and racialized enemy-construction.[33] The Buffy Sainte-Marie controversy illustrates identity extraction, where institutions can make an ungrounded or contested identity claim appear coherent through awards, public memory, media authority, and bureaucratic recognition. These cases are not equivalent, but they share a structure: identity severed from reciprocal relation seeks coherence through performance, domination, recognition, or extraction.

This is why ideological identity substitution must be treated carefully. Political ideology can organize communities, confront injustice, and give people language for understanding the world. It becomes dangerous when it replaces the deeper foundations of identity rather than extending from them. In those circumstances, ideology may supply enemies, certainty, and belonging without requiring reciprocal accountability. In recent U.S. extremist-murder datasets, this pathway has been especially visible and lethal within far-right ecosystems, particularly where grievance is organized through cultural siege, racial hierarchy, replacement narratives, or apocalyptic struggle.[17,20,21] But the broader mechanism is not confined to one political orientation. Across ideological environments, identity instability can become performative, monetized, or exploited by actors who profit from sustained grievance.

The structural sections show the same pattern operating through institutions. Pretendianism is identity extraction: the claiming of Indigenous identity without the reciprocal relations that give such identity political, cultural, and communal legitimacy. Its harm is administrative, epistemic, and material because it redirects resources, distorts public understanding, weakens Indigenous authority, and pressures mixed Indigenous and Afro-Indigenous people into racialized scrutiny.

The solution is not the rejection of identity, politics, or collective belonging. It is the restoration of the conditions under which identity becomes authentic, accountable, and durable. Authentic identity is not produced by symbolic affiliation alone. It emerges through participation in communities where people are known, needed, corrected, protected, and responsible to one another.[10,23] For Indigenous nations, this requires sovereignty and the authority to sustain their own forms of belonging. For settlers, it requires confronting the historical conditions of their presence and seeking forms of belonging that do not depend on erasure, extraction, or racial hierarchy.

If violence represents the implosion of the inauthentic self, then prevention cannot be limited to policing ideology or suppressing conflict after the fact. It requires rebuilding the relational structures that allow people to develop coherent selves without domination.

Communities that cultivate shared responsibility, meaningful belonging, and accountable recognition provide stronger foundations than spectacle, grievance, or manufactured identity can offer.

The Violence of the Inauthentic Self is therefore not only a psychological problem, nor only a political one. It is a symptom of deeper social fragmentation. Where identity is separated from relation, it becomes unstable. Where recognition is separated from accountability, it becomes extractive. Where belonging is replaced by performance, it becomes brittle. Violence, in this framework, is the moment when the inauthentic self attempts to force recognition from a world that cannot sustain it. The answer is not less identity, but identity returned to relation.

Glossary

Anomic Disintegration - A condition in which identity stability deteriorates due to the breakdown of social integration and normative structure.

Anomie - A social condition in which shared norms, expectations, and systems of belonging weaken or collapse, leaving individuals without stable guidance or integration within society.

Colonial Information Technology - A recurring narrative or institutional pattern that shapes public perception in ways that benefit colonial governance, often by redirecting attention away from land, treaty, jurisdiction, sovereignty, and community authority.

Enemy-Construction - The process by which individuals or groups attempt to stabilize a fragile identity by defining another person, group, or community as an existential threat. Enemy-construction converts uncertainty or grievance into a target.

Epistemic Violence - Harm caused through the distortion, erasure, or appropriation of knowledge systems, cultural narratives, or intellectual authority, often within institutional or academic contexts.

False Coherence - A temporary or brittle sense of identity stability produced through ideology, spectacle, enemy-construction, institutional recognition, or symbolic belonging rather than through reciprocal relation and accountability.

Identity Collapse - The breakdown of a coherent self narrative caused by prolonged social isolation, humiliation, or loss of belonging. Individuals experiencing identity collapse struggle to integrate past experiences, present roles, and future aspirations into a stable sense of self.

Identity Crisis - A psychological condition in which individuals cannot successfully integrate social roles, personal history, and future goals into a coherent identity structure.

Identity Entrepreneurs - Individuals who cultivate political, ideological, or cultural audiences by amplifying identity grievances and instability, often converting those conditions into influence, status, or economic gain.

Identity Extraction - The claiming of identity without the reciprocal social relationships that normally confer legitimacy or accountability. Identity becomes detached from community recognition and responsibility.

Identity Foreclosure - A developmental condition in which individuals prematurely commit to a rigid identity structure without undergoing meaningful exploration of alternative identities.

Identity Stabilization - The psychological process through which individuals achieve continuity and coherence in their sense of self through social relationships and narrative integration.

Identity Substitution - The adoption of externally supplied identities such as ideological roles, symbolic narratives, or cultural mythologies in an attempt to stabilize a fragmented or uncertain sense of self.

Inauthentic Self - A constructed identity that emerges through substitution or extraction rather than through lived relationships, reciprocal belonging, and social accountability.

Manufactured Identity - An identity constructed through ideology, symbolism, or abstract narratives rather than through lived social relationships and community participation.

Performed / Performative Identity - Identity expression primarily oriented toward recognition, validation, or symbolic display rather than grounded in relational accountability or community belonging.

Phenotype Policing - The practice of judging a person's legitimacy, belonging, or identity through physical appearance rather than through relation, citizenship, kinship, community recognition, contribution, or political belonging.

Pretendianism - False or exaggerated claims to Indigenous identity that are not grounded in recognition by Indigenous nations, kinship networks, or legitimate citizenship within those communities.

Radicalization - A process through which individuals adopt increasingly extreme beliefs or ideological commitments that justify exclusion, hostility, or violence toward perceived enemies.

Reciprocal Accountability - Mutual responsibility within communities in which individuals are recognized, supported, corrected, and held accountable through ongoing relationships.

Relational Identity / Identity Through Relation - An identity formed through reciprocal relationships within family, community, and social institutions rather than through abstract or symbolic affiliation alone.

Re-Racialization - The process by which a political, relational, or nation-based identity is forced back into racial categories such as phenotype, ancestry percentage, DNA, or visual appearance.

Settler Colonialism - A colonial system in which settlers seek to replace Indigenous populations and establish permanent occupation of land while displacing existing political and cultural systems.

Shame-Based Violence - Violent behavior motivated by perceived humiliation, loss of status, or threats to personal identity and self-worth, often emerging when individuals attempt to restore damaged identity through domination or retaliation.

Social Disconnection - The erosion or absence of meaningful interpersonal relationships that normally provide belonging, accountability, emotional regulation, and social integration.

Sovereignty - The authority of a political community or nation to govern itself, determine its own membership, and exercise jurisdiction over its lands, institutions, and political life.

Structural Violence - Forms of harm embedded within institutions, policies, or social systems that systematically disadvantage or marginalize certain populations without requiring direct physical force.

Whiteness - A historically manufactured legal, social, and political classification that organizes hierarchy and status rather than an authentic ethnicity or reciprocal culture. In this essay, whiteness is treated as a colonial identity formation rather than a biological or moral category.

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